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off to Catalina Island, 1900



From San Pedro Due South to Catalina Island

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Yesterday's truths never seem quite real enough a few decades later.

Travel to Catalina Island today is as easy as taking a color picture with an Instamatic camera. Travel there by private boat, a sailboat or a motor cruiser if you will. A public launch or a water taxi will do the job even more quickly. The most posh is to take the Great White Steamship from Wilmington and the ultimate convenience is to whoo-oosh there in about 20 anxious minutes in a flying boat.

Some 75 years ago the only way to get to Shatto's Island, presently called Catalina, was to travel in a small boat. You have to have traveled in a small boat **then** to realize what a **small boat** meant to a vacationing, family-laden Catalina islandgoer.

In the early 1900's the principal and most popular Catalina steamboat was the Banning-owned tugboat FALCON. Soon after her appearance on the Catalina run the WARRIOR, a second Banning towboat doubled one's opportunities for the channel crossing. A ticket on either of these two tiny stalwarts of the deep meant only a seat on an unsteady wooden, folding camp chair (Remember them?) This chair with the others was placed well aft on the tug's fan-tail. It was fresh and windy back there, almost always spray-covered and predictably wet and slippery-decked. A bit of smoke and cinders from the coal-burning engine could be expected as well. The passage across the channel was long and the little tugs rolled from port to starboard and back again, with-

out cessation and without mercy. To realize that dramamine had not yet been discovered rounds out the picture of an early crossing to Catalina Island.

As island visits increased in popularity, successful efforts to make the channel passage more pleasant were developed. Two new steamers, the HERMOSA and the CABRILLO entered the run from San Pedro. By contrast to the previous two, tiny, wind-smitten tugboats, these new craft were relatively floating palaces. They were much larger, took less time to cross the channel and had inside accommodations for the passengers. They even included a contemporary "snack bar" of sorts. Unhappily, the channel wind blew as strong and as steadily on their exposed decks as on the tugs and sad to say they rolled

Shatto's elegant Catalina hostelry.
Peace, quiet, fishing, rowing,
swimming, inside plumbing and inside
meals were the total attractions
of early-day Avalon.



as often as the tugs and as nastily.

However, nothing deterred the pleasure-seeking Angeleno and aye, the visiting Easterner or European, from seeing and touring the Catalina Island of yesterday. It was a beautiful spot in a rugged fashion. The relaxation and sport available were typical of the period and the facilities for their enjoyment were simple but ample. A kind of "camping-out" existence in Tent City was the order of the day. Dining was very much alfresco with the picnic basket ever present. Sea-fishing and sailing were very popular, while less strenuous entertainment featured community singing, hiking, horseback riding, rowboating in the Bay at Avalon and of course, young couples zealously looking for seashells late into the night on the sandy bay

beaches.

In lieu of dancing to the music of Guy Lombardo at the Avalon Ballroom, one could climb to the top of the many-stepped Sugar Loaf Rock in the same location. A dizzying ride over the switch-backed mountain roads featured the Banning stagecoach and six spirited horses. The stage driver was universally feared as the "hot-rod" driver of his day.

For restless and curious spirits as well as any amateur ichthyologists there were glass-bottomed, sea-viewing boats. Three, sidewheel paddle boats, twice-daily, provided rich opportunities for passengers to sit closely packed together on wooden benches; glimpse the "wonders of the deep" and rub knees pleasantly if the adjoining knees were

worth the trouble.

Our photographs of yesteryear show us a different Catalina Island from the one we know today. It was a vacation spot harder to get to, rougher to live upon, much less explored and developed, clearly less convenient and notwithstanding all of this an island gem of great beauty. It held out rich and varied possibilities for the outdoor, picnic-type life of yesterday's vacations.

Could our vacationing forbears making their seasick way to Catalina Island have visualized their progeny making **their** frenetic, airsick way to the island paradise for the modern vacation? It is doubtful of course, yet the notion is a sobering one to ponder upon . . . on to Hawaii, on to Tahiti, on to Majorca . . . on, on, on.



In the beginning there was the sandy beach, Shatto's hotel, Sugar Loaf rock, a visiting schooner and the steamer FERNDALE. A few . . . very few visitors . . . and that was all.



Avalon soon began to spread out. Cabins crept up the hills in the ravines and on the gentle slopes. Tent City started; the Banning home was built and the HERMOSA was a regular visitor . . . with tourists.

A busy booming Avalon soon was the predictable product. Now there were many hotels, stores and businesses. So many that a beach Esplanade was built. The pier had a wharf on it; Sugar Loaf had a ladder to climb it and the south slope of the Bay had a cog wheel tramway.



Progress . . . as we know it . . . finally came to Avalon. No more peace. No more quiet. Instead 3 and 4 piers, two Big White Steamers, the famous Avalon Ballroom, moorings for pleasure boats and the solid foundation for a permanent, prospering tourist business economy.

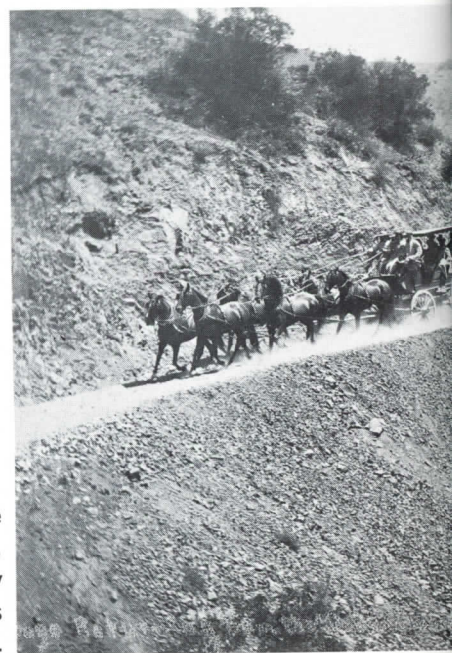




Sugar Loaf Rock, mecca for the hardy visitors to Catalina. Only eighty four (count 'em) individual steps to the observation platform at its peak.



Catalina could be whatever the romantic spirit wished. Here it suggests the Italian Coast, wild, deserted, rocky and enchanting.



The Banning six-horse stage was the **thing** to do on Catalina. It was long, hot, a bit tiresome and terribly exciting. Few visitors missed this fast-paced island tour.



As Avalon grew there were hotels for the weary, billiard parlors and beer for the "depraved" and beach promenading for the "seekers." Of course there was swimming, boating and fishing as well.

Ah . . . who could forget the thrills and delights of Tent City. All of the pleasures of the outdoors in a mildly organized way. This was the fiscal answer to the "average" Catalina Island tourist . . . and them were the days . . . believe me!



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